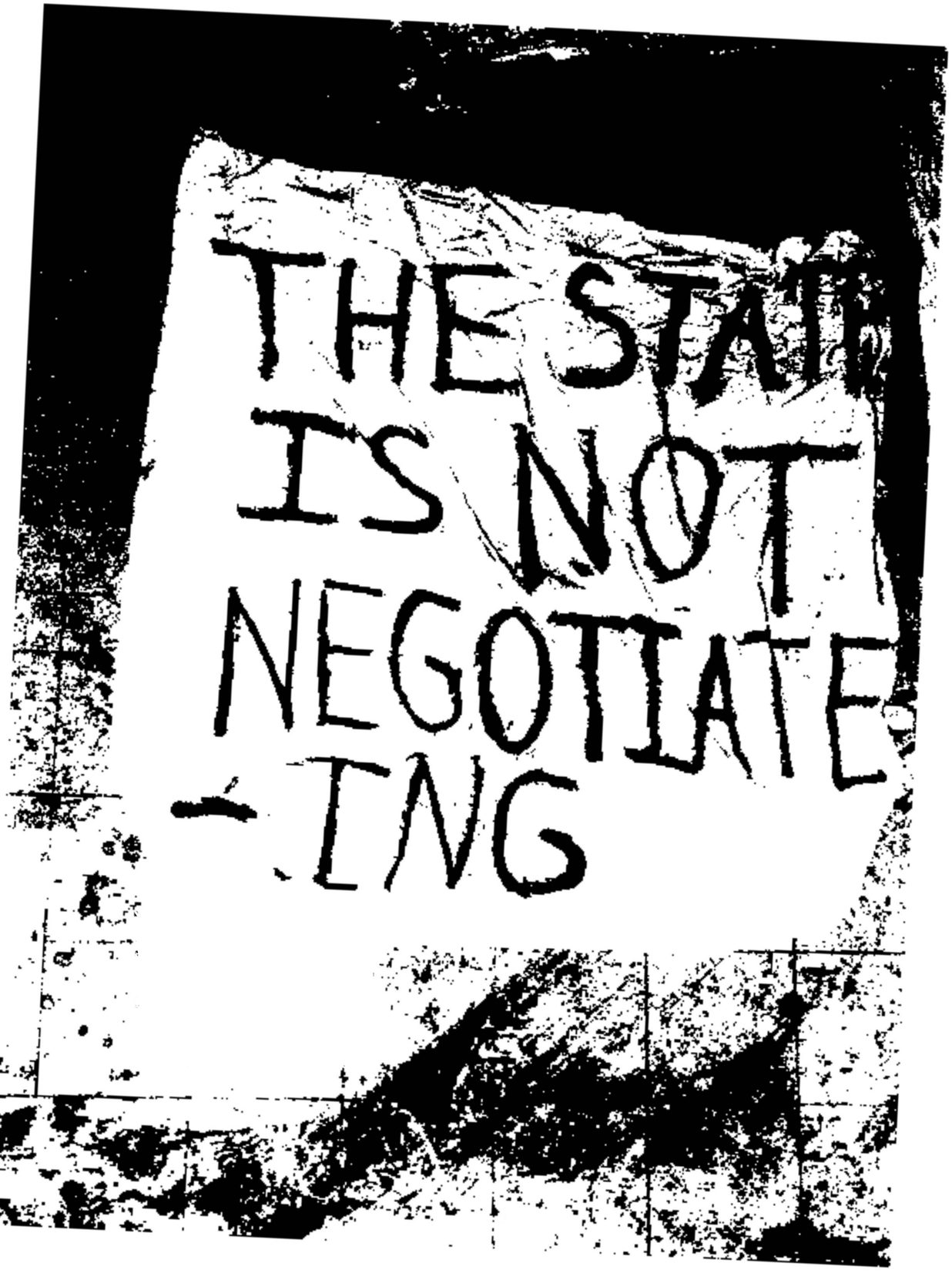
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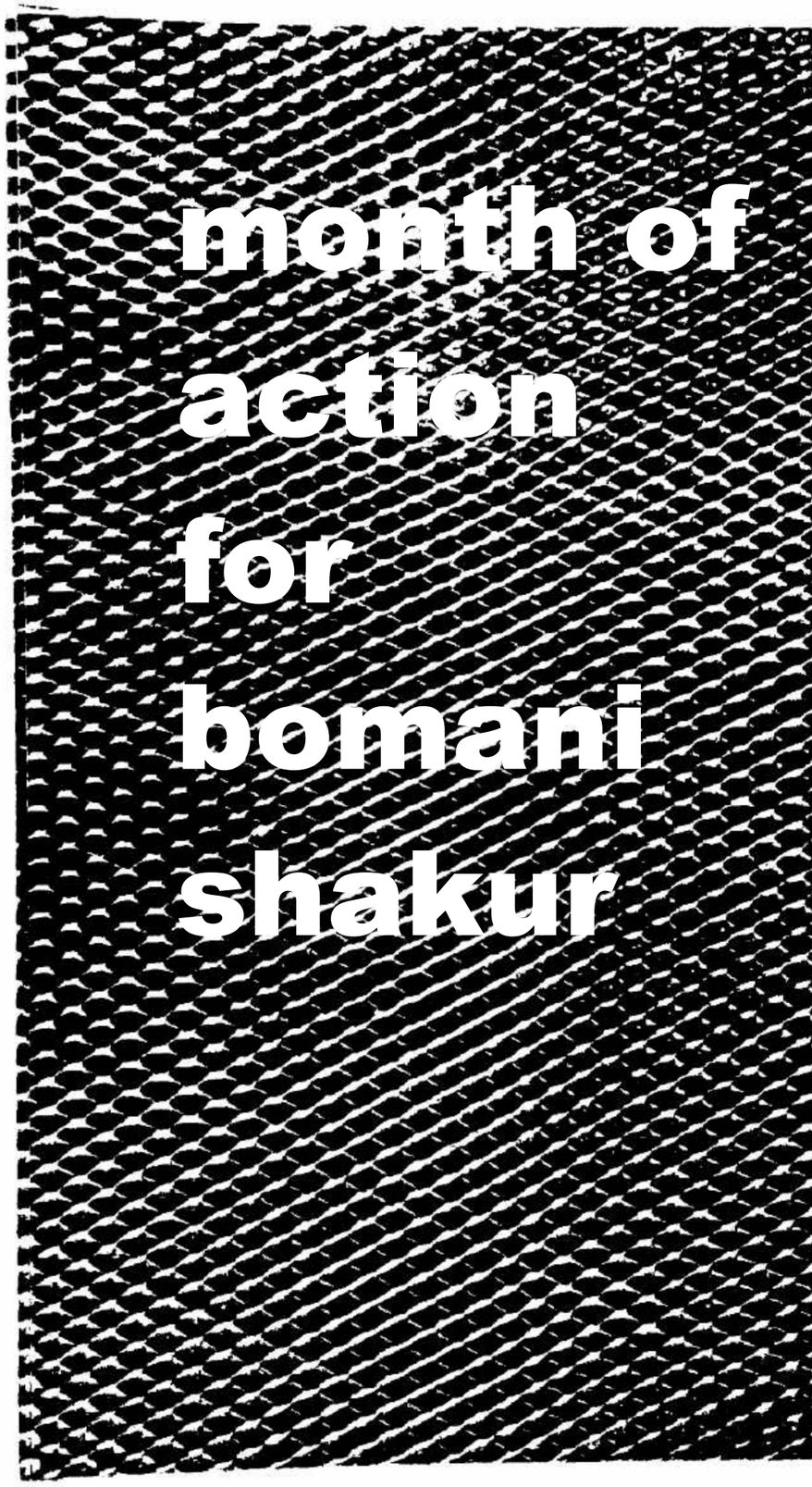
month of
action
for
bomani
shakur

Most of these writings are republished, some without credit to the original sources. We apologize in advance and want to note that none of the written contents of this reader are the original works of members of True Leap Press.

The Revolutionary Abolitionist Movement is a political movement dedicated to freeing people from bondage and building resistance in the United States. We situate our political movement in the context of the abolitionist struggle against slavery and continue in the tradition, from Nat Turner to the Black Liberation Movement. We believe the Civil War was never resolved and the system of slavery transitioned into the prison industrial complex. Our struggle today must begin from this starting point. Lastly, as revolutionary anarchists, the abolitionist struggle must be extended to the state and capitalism, the perpetrators of oppression. The revolutionary movement in the US today is at a cross roads, as fascist movements are expanding, and the state becomes increasingly authoritarian. The Rojava Revolution, in northern Syria, provides us with a model for revolution today with its foundation in communal and council based political organization and militant defense.

www.revolutionaryabolition.org

NYC Anarchist Black Cross

BLUE RIDGE ANARCHIST BLACK CROSS

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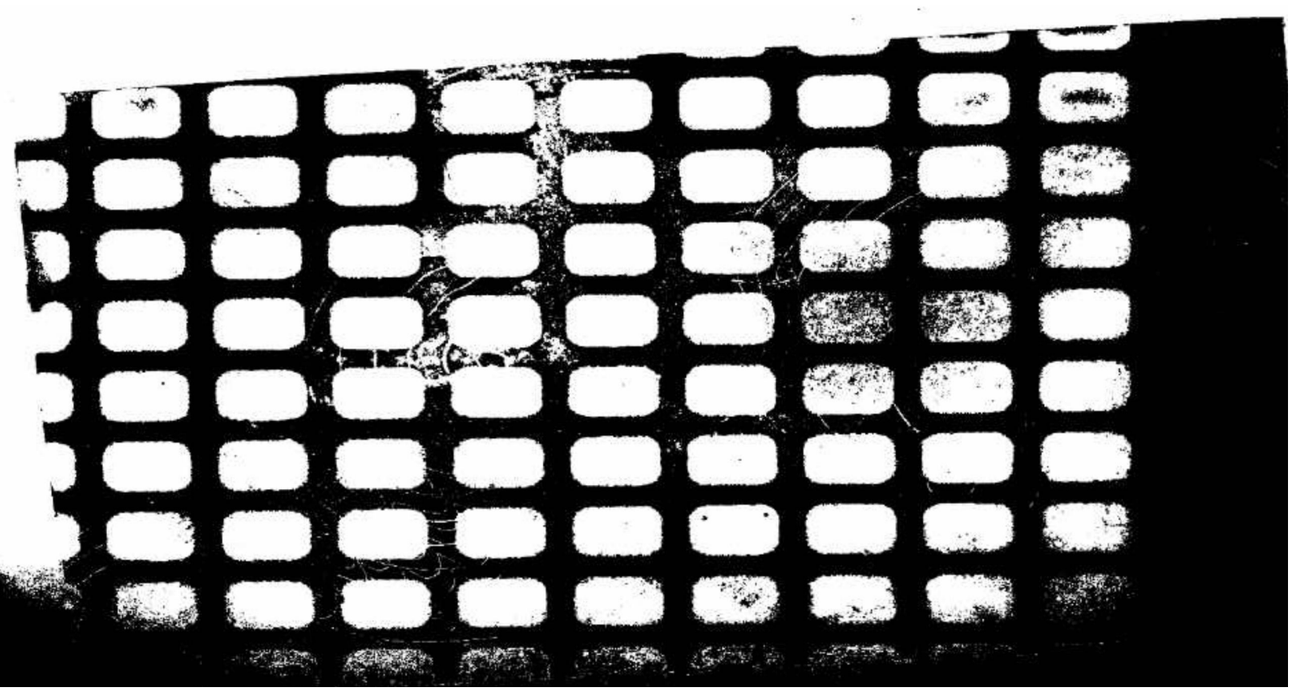


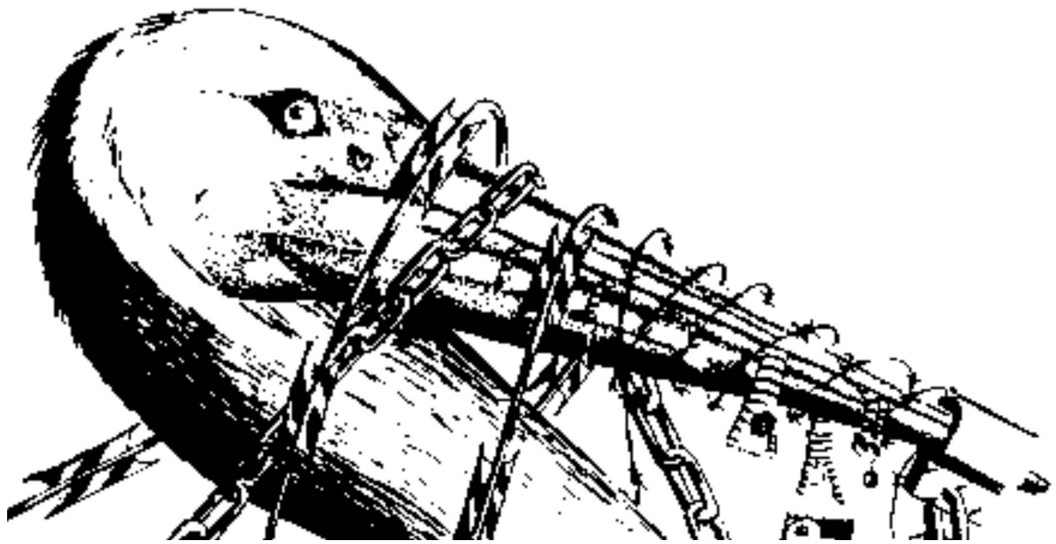
- Provide adequate food
- Expand and provide constructive programming and privileges for indefinite SHU status inmates

Let's come together to assist these men in their time of need and show them that their status as "criminals" does not automatically disqualify them from being human beings. In my time of need, I found this to be the truth and it reaffirmed my faith in humanity. Give these men the opportunity to feel that outpouring of compassion.

And to the men at Pelican Bay – Todd, Danny et al – I simply want to say: Stay the course; pay attention to what you are doing; and when things get rough (and they will), know that you are not alone. By and through the activation of what he called "Satygraha" – or truth force – Mahatma Gandhi awakened the largest democracy in the world. In every evil that threatens us, the truth – once known – has the power to set us free. Hold on to that.

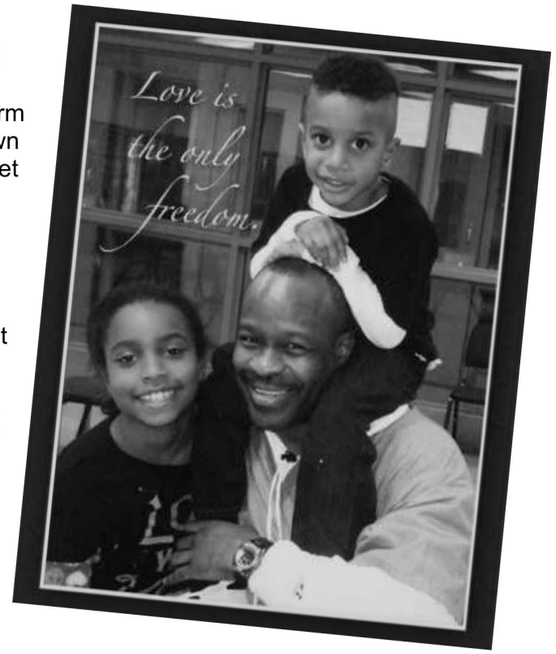
The system as it currently exists must change, and this, what you all are doing right now, may very well be the catalyst to bring about that change. Remember that.

And remember this: The first three days are the hardest; after that, it's mind over matter. When the body is brought under control, the mind is set free to receive revelations. Be on the lookout for that; and when they come, when the truth of your situation is revealed, stay in that space. Drink as much water as you can, stay hydrated (read: coffee is a diuretic). And when the time comes, be sure to get everything in writing!



Letter of Support for the Hunger Strikers

Written July 3, 2011



Ask anyone who has ever been on a hunger strike, and they will tell you that the process of intentionally starving oneself is a very painful ordeal. Typically speaking, it is a protracted form of suicide; taken too far, the body will shut down and die. And yet, there are places on this planet where the idea of death is preferable to continuing down a path that offers no hope or relief from suffering. I live in such a place; I know.

In January of this year (2011), and after almost 13 years of solitary confinement at the Ohio State Penitentiary (OSP), I and several others went on hunger strike. It was the hardest thing I've ever done.

However, after countless appeals to reason had failed, and after coming to the end of all that we could do – law suits, grievances, petitions etc. – we made the decision to risk our very lives in order to bring about the necessary changes that would allow us to live as human beings. In the end, we stood firm, garnered worldwide support and prevailed.

Now prisoners in California, confined in the notorious Security Housing Unit (SHU) at Pelican Bay State Prison, have decided to undertake a similar course of action. To them, I say: Bravo!

In a country that incarcerates more of its citizens than any other country in the world – over 2.6 million men and women behind bars – human rights violations are inevitable, and it falls to those of us who must suffer through the experience to stand up and speak truth to power; for, as Frederick Douglass suggested: "Power concedes nothing without a demand."

In the days to come, the men at Pelican Bay will need each and every one of us to support them, to stand with them as they seek to bring their situation to a tolerable level. What they are demanding is basic:

- Individual accountability
- Abolish debriefing policy and modify active/inactive gang status criteria
- Comply with U.S. Commission 2006 recommendations regarding an end to long-term solitary confinement

April: A month of action for Bomani Shakur

by the Revolutionary Abolitionist Movement (RAM)

Shakur is best known for the 1993 Lucasville Uprising, a rebellion inside the walls of an Ohio prison against tyranny and harsh conditions.

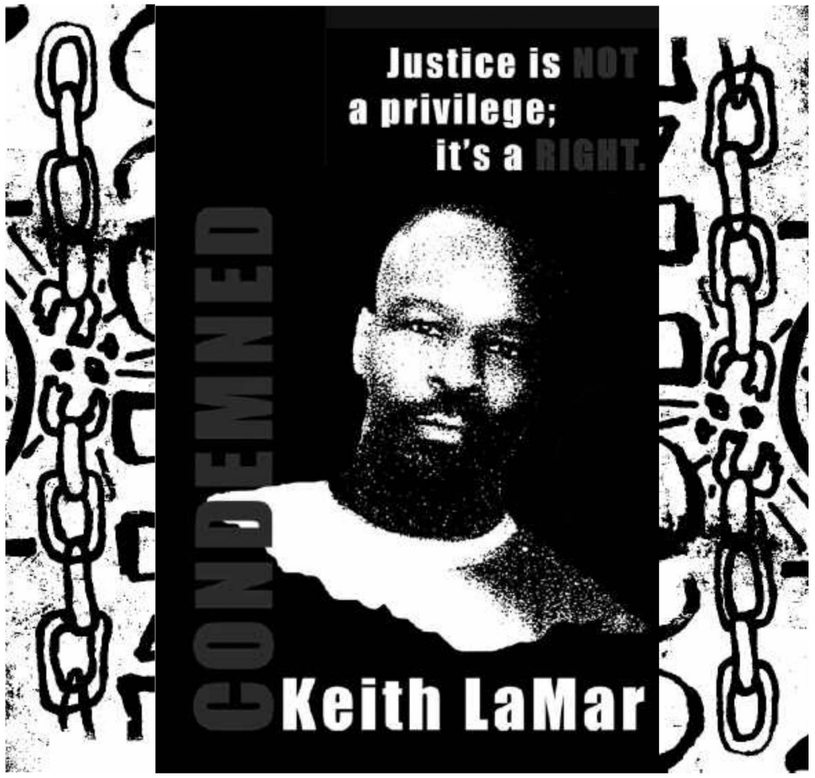
This April, 2020, we invite you to participate in a month of actions and events for comrade Bomani Shakur.

Bomani Shakur has been showering our world with beautiful gifts. His words and actions haven't missed a beat in elevating those he knows and even those he has never met. His voice and his words came to be widely recognized when he was

unjustly persecuted after the 1993 Lucasville Uprising, a rebellion inside the walls of an Ohio prison against tyranny and harsh conditions.

In the aftermath, Bomani was falsely accused of having murdered prisoners and having “led a death squad.” No physical evidence connects him to the murders that took place when the prison in Lucasville was in uprising.

The verdict itself only came about due to forced testimony by a prisoner turned snitch. In 2004 Bomani wrote a book called “Condemned” to highlight his life and the truth about what happened.



Prisoners organizing, confronting their oppressor and the organizers being attacked by the state as retaliation is nothing new. In 1971 prisoners in San Quentin, California, revolted.

Because of who we are, they felt that doing a thorough job wasn’t necessary. After all, who’s going to give a damn about a bunch of criminals? With this as their attitude, they utilized a “first-come-first-served” strategy and ended up charging several different people with the same crimes, using different theories; and, in some cases, allowed the actual perpetrators to point the finger elsewhere if they were willing to assist the prosecution in cleaning up its books.

Simply put, what they did to us is a travesty of justice; and yet, our convictions have remained intact through the lower courts of appeal and are quickly making their way through the federal courts. In other words, if we don’t do something to get out in front of this thing, they are going to kill us soon. And it may be that, no matter what we do, they are going to kill us anyway. Well, OK. But if that be the case, let us at least make sure that they not be able to call it justice. If they kill us, let us at least be able to call it what it really is: **murder.**

Friends, we don’t have to accept this; we don’t have to continue down the path of least resistance, allowing them to do with us whatever they please. If we stand together and speak truth to power, they will have no choice but to right this wrong. They did it in the current confrontation, and they will do it again, not because they want to but because they have to.

Whenever hypocrisy is confronted by the truth, it must capitulate. Therefore, the key to fighting these people is to expose the truth and then hold it up next to what they claim to represent. If we can do this well enough, they will either have to practice what they preach or, as Malcolm X suggests, preach what they practice. Our job is to make sure they don’t have it both ways.

Our friend, Staughton Lynd, has written a book about the uprising, Lucasville: The Untold Story of a Prison Uprising, and we need to encourage people to read it. In the coming days, weeks and months, we need to formulate plans to reintroduce the play and launch the documentary, Dark Little Secret, all with the intended purpose of making as many people as possible aware of what actually happened during the uprising and its aftermath.

Ultimately, the goal is to compose a petition, similar in scope to the ones that were recently circulated, which will then be presented to the governor with the demand that he either issue a general amnesty with respect to all of the Lucasville cases or, in the alternative, convene a panel of qualified experts to determine whether or not a general amnesty is warranted.

In closing, I want to thank each and every one of you for coming forward as you did. I am both humbled and uplifted by the support. When I phoned my 8-year-old niece, Kayla, afterwards and informed her that “Uncle Keith will be able to touch your little hand soon,” she, with excitement brimming in her voice, said, “That’s awesome!” And I couldn’t agree with her more: What we did was awesome! We came together and spoke truth to power and won! Imagine that!

Power to the people!

Power to the People:
A Welcome Prison Victory in Ohio

01-23-2011

Although on a very small scale (which by no means diminishes the deed), we, the people, have wrought a revolution – "a sudden and momentous change in a situation" – and accomplished in 12 days what the powers that be have repeatedly told us would never happen. Indeed, for the first time in 16 years, I will be able to hug and kiss my family again! There are no words to express the profound gratitude I feel.

The late, great, revolutionary leader, Che Guevara, once said: "A true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love!" Well, while I cannot claim to be a revolutionary in the strict sense of the word, it is a great feeling of love – for you, the people – that is guiding me right now: Even as I write this, tears of hope and determination are streaming down my face.

When one has been forced to live in a space no larger than a closet for 16 years, 23 hours a day, not only does one begin to feel extremely insignificant, but the very world begins to shrink; and everything, even the smallest thing, seems impossible. Hence, never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined the overwhelming outpouring of love and support that came flooding into my cell after I cried out for help.

People from all over the country and the world – England, Ireland, Serbia, Amsterdam – reached out and joined together with us to right an injustice; and surprisingly, miraculously, we succeeded! Everything we demanded was properly handed over.

It would be great if I could say that the worst is over now, and that, with victory in hand, I can live happily ever after. Unfortunately, I don't have the luxury of living in a fairy tale; the people who are trying to take my life are real, not a figment of my imagination.

In fact, not even a week after my piece, "If We Must Die," was posted and we embarked on the hunger strike, a federal district judge turned down my appeal, which placed me even further in the balance. It would be naïve of me to believe that this was just a coincidence, an unrelated incident that just so happened to coincide with our peaceful, nonviolent demonstration.

As you may recall, I said some very harsh things – all of them true – against the system; and I say them again: This system is bogus and sold to those with money. In other words, if you don't have the capital, you get the punishment, and justice, like everything else in this capitalist nightmare, is nothing more than a commodity that is reserved for the highest bidder. Need I say more?

Friends, I beg you not to abandon me to this mockery; inasmuch as my life is not for them to take, I intend to fight them, and I (we) need your help. What they did to us cannot stand up under the bright light of scrutiny.

George Jackson was killed and Hugo Pinell would spend the following 44 years in California's harshest prisons only to be stabbed to death in 2015 by white supremacists. It's important to recognize that prisoners stand up, organize and are attacked by the state for it. In response, the prisoner strikes back by persevering, surviving and continuing to build with fellow prisoners and those of us on this side of the wall.

As we see with letters, articles or the book Bomani wrote, the message carried by his words have touched people inside and out and spread far. How could a man sitting on death row, his execution date only three years away, be the source of so much kindness and inspiration?

It is because, as he says, this situation is much bigger than him. This is about the entire movement.

The fact that the state has set Bomani Shakur's date of execution is not a moment of tragedy or for despair, but a moment to build from, and to be moved to action.

It is about how we come together, learn how to work together, and prepare to rescind the power of those who run the most efficient life destroying machine: the prison system.

He is clear how this works on his end: He's not interested in allowing others to characterize him as unsuccessful, as a victim. He doesn't want activists crowding around, showing pity.

It is not for them to decide who he is and if he is successful. Success has already begun the day you decide to get up and do something about the situation. He is looking for collaborators, people who understand and want to struggle together.

This is where we come in. The fact that the state has set Bomani Shakur's date of execution is not a moment of tragedy or for despair, but a moment to build from, and to be moved to action.

This is how we follow his excellent example and this is how we turn this situation against the state. Their system thrives off despair. We will build our bonds of solidarity, lines of communication, respectful dialogue and comradely exchange.

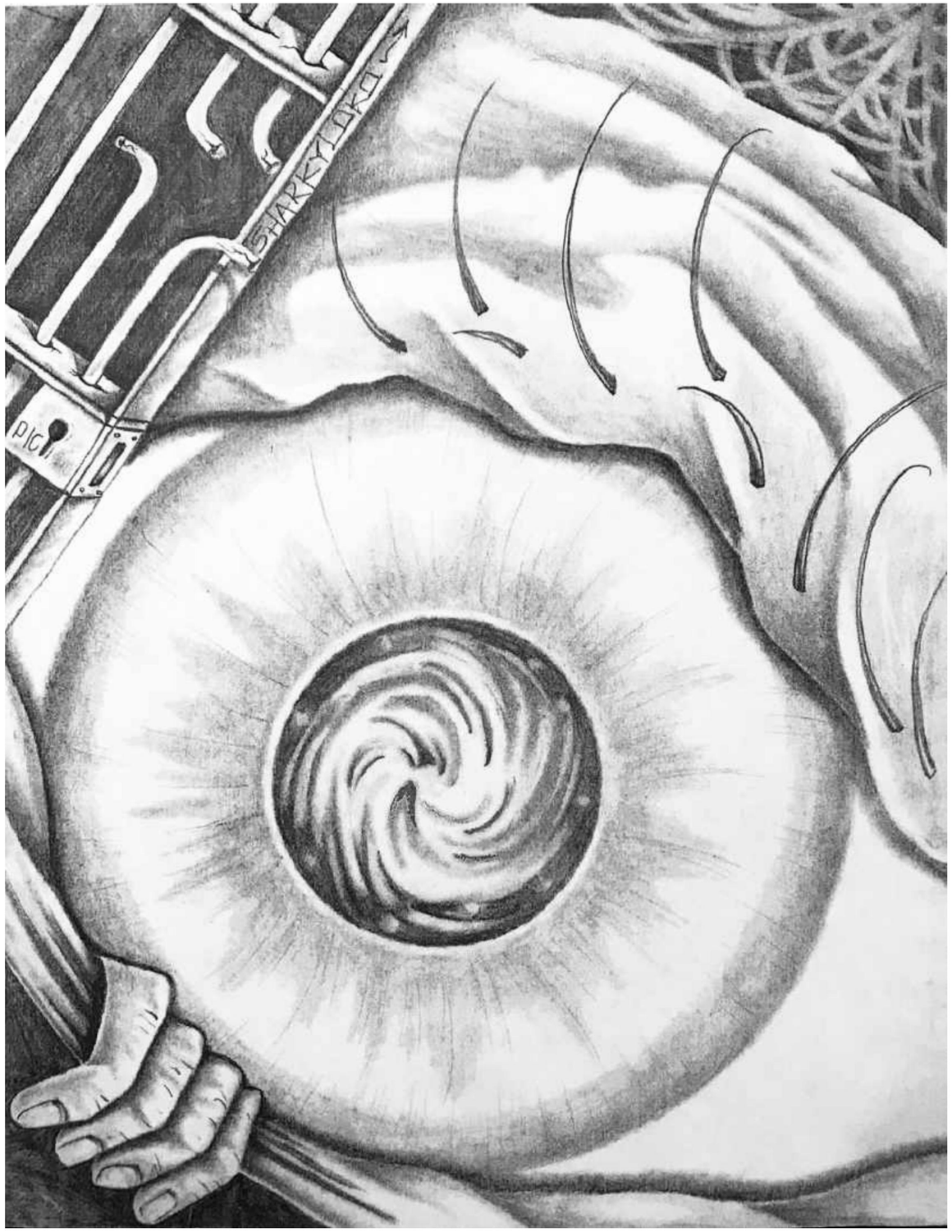
Bomani plays with his niece and nephew during a visit. He won the right to "contact visits," replacing the glass wall that separates a prisoner from his visitors, a practice that is common for prisoners classified as high risk, whether that designation is warranted or not.

We will amplify the words of Bomani Shakur and become an impenetrable and intractable force – a force for life, a force for comradeship. We will be as kind and accepting to our comrades and those hunted by the state as we are dangerous to and unrelenting against the prisons.

We begin with April, a month of solidarity actions with Bomani. Please join in this initiative by:

- holding a letter writing event,
- screening the movie about the Lucasville uprising,
- putting up posters,
- posting about it on social media,
- hanging banners,
- inviting Bomani to do a call-in event with you and your comrades, or
- any other action or event that raises his profile and builds the kind of movement that is a reflection of his steadfastness and generosity.

April is the anniversary month of the Lucasville prison uprising, a powerful decision to stand up and reclaim a life of dignity and an example of the power of unity among prisoners. This month is to raise awareness about Bomani and his contributions, and by doing so, to build stronger connections with one another, and with comrades inside.



to stop dreaming – and gain control over things – is for one to open one's eyes. My eyes are open now.

Is it too late? I don't know. As I said, the books have been written, the play has been performed and, pretty soon, the documentary will be completed. But what good are these things if they never enter into the stream of public opinion and force the governor – who answers to the public – to issue a general amnesty?

Admittedly, convincing the governor to bend in our favor will be a difficult undertaking, one that will require huge amounts of energy and effort on our behalf. But it can be done; at the very least, it can be attempted.

In the meantime, we who have been sentenced to death must be granted the exact same privileges as other death-sentenced prisoners. If we must die, we should be allowed to do so with dignity, which is all we're asking: the opportunity to pursue our appeals unimpeded, to be able to touch our friends and family, and to no longer be treated as playthings but as human beings who are facing the ultimate penalty.

Again, I stress that fact that I do not want to die, but in the words of Claude McKay [in the poem often called the inaugural address of the Harlem Renaissance – about the Harlem "race riot," when whites attacked Blacks], I share the following as my parting sentiments:

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die, O, let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us through deed!
O kinsmen! We must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

Join together with us and carry forward Bomani's strength and spirit!

From your comrades in

Anarchists Worldwide
Antifa Sacramento
Atlanta Abolition
Blue Ridge ABC
NYC Anarchist Black Cross
Revolutionary Abolitionist Movement
Salish Sea Black Autonomists
Page One Collective

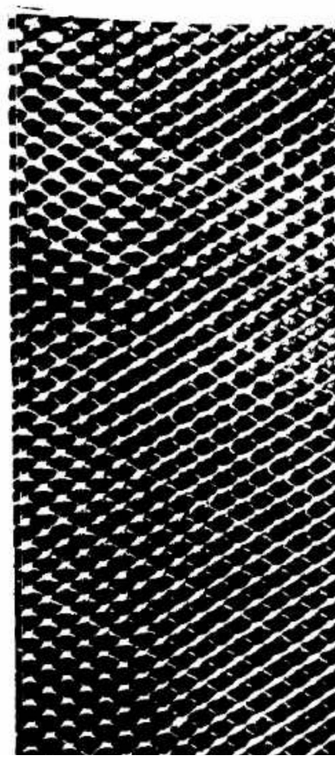
To sign on to this call,
message revolutionaryabolitionistmovement@protonmail.com.

Support websites:

- https://lucasvillejustice.wordpress.com
- https://www.keithlamar.org
- https://www.lucasvilleamnesty.org/

Send our brother some love and light:

Keith LaMar, 317-117, OSP,
878 Coitsville-Hubbard Road,
Youngstown, OH, 44505.



Bomani Shakur's life matters

The campaign to stop the execution of Bomani Shakur must not end there but continue until he can return to his real home. Meanwhile, he's forced to live in this bathroom-sized solitary cell.

And then they offered me a deal: "Cop out to murder and we'll forget the whole thing," they told me. "But I'm innocent," I said, thinking to myself that the truth of this would somehow set me free. And so, with the trust and faith of a fool, I went to trial, thinking and believing that I would receive a fair one (I didn't) and that I would ultimately be exonerated (I wasn't).

We have been tortured. And yes, I am aware that the word "tortured" is a strong word to use, but I know of no other word that adequately describes what we have been through. We have been put through hell.

And then, when I was sentenced to death, it was my understanding that I would be placed on Death Row and allowed to pursue my appeals alongside other similarly-sentenced prisoners; but, again, I misunderstood … "Just wait until you get to federal court," I was told, "and you'll definitely get some relief there." So I waited… I waited for 16 years!

If justice as a concept is real, then I could with some justification say, "Justice delayed is justice denied." But this has never been about justice, and I finally, finally, finally understand that. For the past 16 years, I (we) have been nothing more than a scapegoat for the state, and convenient excuse that they can point to whenever they need to raise the specter of fear among the public or justify the expenditure of inordinate amounts of money for more locks and chains.

And not only that, but the main reason behind the double penalty that we have been undergoing is so that we can serve as an example of what happens to those who challenge the power and authority of the state. And like good little pawns, we're supposed to sit here and wait until they take us to their death chamber, strap us down to a gurney, and pump poison through our veins.

Fuck that! I refuse to go out like that: used as a tool by the state to put fear into the hearts of others while legitimizing a system that is bogus and sold to those with money. That's not my destiny.

At the beginning of this I wanted to make it perfectly clear that I didn't want to die, and I don't. Life is a beautiful thing, especially when one is conscious and aware of the value of one's life. Sadly, it took going through this process for me to wake up and finally understand the value of my life.

I say "wake up" because, unbeknownst to me I had been asleep all this time, oblivious to the reality of my situation and unaware that the only way for one

But let us for the moment put aside the question of my guilt or innocence, because that, believe it or not, is not what this is about. On that score, we have written several books, produced a play and are putting the final touches on a full-scale documentary to illustrate the travesty of justice that has taken place here; and these things are available to you if you are interested. For now, I want to talk about dying…

In all that is presently unclear, one thing is certain: I have been sentenced to death, which, as you know, is the severest penalty known to man. Typically, when one has been given the death penalty, one is placed alongside other similarly-sentenced prisoners and they, together, are housed in an area that has been designated as Death Row. As living situations go, this is a very bleak and miserable place: Men are sent here to die, to be killed by the state. No one in their right mind would ask to be sent here; and yet, this is precisely what I am asking, which should give you an indication of just how insufferable the situation I am living under is. And I am not alone…

When the uprising was over, and all was said and done, five of us were singled out as leaders and sentenced to death. Jason Robb, James Were (or Namir, as he prefers to be called), Siddique Abdullah Hasan, George Skatzes and myself. With the exception of George Skatzes, who for the past 10 years has been in a less pressurized though by no means acceptable situation, we have undergone penalty on top of penalty, been kept from fully participating in our appeals, from touching our friends and families, denied adequate medical treatment and so many other things that are too numerous to name.

In a word, we have been tortured. And yes, I am aware that the word "tortured" is a strong word to use, but I know of no other word that adequately describes what we have been through. We have been put through hell.

A few months ago, a federal judge recommended that my case be dismissed, which effectively moved me one step closer to being executed. It's hard to explain how this made me feel; but upon hearing the news I immediately thought that a mistake had been made and that my attorneys had somehow misunderstood the judge's ruling. As it turns out, I was the one who misunderstood. Indeed, I have been "misunderstanding" things all along.

When I was first named as a suspect in riot-related crimes, I was certain that my name would eventually be cleared. Instead, I received a nine-count murder indictment with death-penalty specifications. I was shocked.

End Prison Slavery in Amerika! Liberate the Caged Voices! Incarcerated workers, never give up!

Dare to struggle, Dare to win, ALL POWER TO THE PEOPLE!

If We Must Die

01-05- 2011

(Note: This piece was written just two days after a hunger strike had begun wherein four of the Lucasville death-sentenced inmates were protesting their being held in indefinite solitary confinement. Their demand was that they would be placed on Death Row and afforded the same rights as all the other Ohio inmates on Death Row, as opposed to facing the double penalty of execution and ongoing total sensory deprivation.)

Before I speak my piece, let me make one thing perfectly clear: I don't want to die. I want to live and breathe and strive to do something righteous with my life. Truly. For the past 16 years, however, I've been in solitary confinement, confined to a cell 23 hours a day for something I didn't do, and, speaking honestly, I have gone as far as I am willing to go.

Am I giving up? No. This is a protest, the only non-violent way I can think of to express the deep disdain I have for the unjust situation that I am in. Make no mistake: My physical and mental strength is intact. However, to continue on in this way would be to lend legitimacy to a process that is both fraudulent and vindictive; this I am no longer willing to do.

I realize that for some of you the thought that an innocent man could be sent to prison and ultimately executed is inconceivable. But it happens. In a system that's based more on competition than on the equitable treatment of others, the football field is not the only place where participants are encouraged to win at any cost.

Hence, in order to be victorious, some prosecutors hide evidence, lie in open court and even pay for the perjured testimony of their witnesses. And this is exactly what happened in my case – and in the majority of cases stemming from the 1993 prison uprising at the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility in Lucasville, Ohio; and there are a few people among you who have reviewed the file and know this to be the truth.

To continue on in this way would be to lend legitimacy to a process that is both fraudulent and vindictive; this I am no longer willing to do.

directly here at Ohio State Penitentiary. And what we are trying to do – that is, me and my small network of people, friends and family are trying to do – is to bring my case to a larger audience. But again, as I say, JR, my situation might not be able to prevent these people from killing me, murdering me. Mike Brown wasn't able to stop them for murdering him. Eric Garner wasn't. So it's not always that we will be able to stop these people from murdering us. They've been killing niggers in this country for centuries and I don't think they have any intentions on stopping that any time soon unless we demand that it be stopped.

And I think that part of what we have to do as individuals and collectively is keep standing up to these people even if we must die in the process. Even if we must give our lives in the process, we have to still stand up because it's the right thing to do and because youngsters who look at us, who are coming behind us can know that it's not really about whether or not you get killed; it's about whether you had the courage to stand up and live.

And so, that's basically what I'm trying to do with my life. I'm trying to use my life as an example for these younger cats who are looking at me, who are coming behind me just to understand that you have to stand up. You have to say "No" when you're being led down a road that you don't want to go down.

You have to stop. You have to resist. And you can do that, even if it means losing your life, because at the end of the day they only can kill you one time, but you can die over and over again if you keep bowing down to this pressure. You feel what I'm saying?

M.O.I. JR: Yes, sir. *[Automated Voice: This call is originating from an Ohio Correctional Facility and may be recorded and monitored.]*

M.O.I. JR: Well brother, we salute you. I push the Block Report listeners, the Freedom Now listeners, the Bay View newspaper readers and everybody else who can hear my voice to support you, to get involved, to get educated so that we know where to aim and how to fight. You know, bro, whatever you need we're right here at your service. So let us know.

Bomani: Yeah, I appreciate that.

M.O.I. JR: Yes, sir. So let us know. And we will be talking to you very soon.

Bomani: OK, good, good. Thanks a lot, JR, man, you have a good day and stay vigilant, bro. Keep your eyes open, man. Keep doing what you're doing 'cause it's very important, man. Thanks a lot. Much love to you, JR.

M.O.I. JR: Thank you, brother, and much love to you.

02/16/2020

It's been quite some time since I last chimed in, I know. Sitting in this cell, I sometimes forget that being a voice in this world requires speaking out who (and where) you are from time to time, and reporting truly what you see and feel. Truth be told, I stumbled a bit and lost my footing after receiving an execution date at the end of 2018. It made me so mad: having an expiration date attached to my existence! Days, weeks–a whole year slipped into the future.

But why so mad? When I was first indicted twenty-seven years ago, the state offered me a "deal" that, had I taken it, would have protected me against the death penalty. True, I would have had to plead guilty to something I didn't do, but at least I would've been able to hold on to my life without the fear of being strapped down to a gurney one day; and wasn't that the most important thing, to preserve my life? Well, I guess that depends on what one considers one's life, doesn't it?

Back in 1993,

when all this started, I'd been reading Frantz Fanon and Malcolm X , and, through them, was given to understand that life isn't so much about the preservation of the body but the preservation of the mind, of one's principles and beliefs. To them, it was futile to "survive" in a body without a functioning brain, and without the strength and fortitude to stand up for what you believed in. I came to feel the same. What upset me, then, was not the fact that I went forward and failed, but that I went forward and found out that the game was rigged. I was mad because I felt cheated.

Early on, when I was first thrown into solitary confinement, I took up reading adventure magazines to pull my mind away from the monotony of staring at four walls all day. Reading provided a window through which I could see life. One day I stumbled upon a story about a man who attempted, singlehandedly, to circumnavigate the globe on a sailboat. Had he succeeded, he would have been one of few men to achieve such a feat. About halfway through his journey, however, the boat capsized after running into a terrible storm, which forced him to abort the mission.

A few weeks later a reporter showed up at the man's house to conduct an interview: he wanted to know how it felt to have failed? "First of all, I reject that characterization,"

the man said. “I didn’t fail; I got off my couch and tried to do something with my life…” He went on to describe some of the things he saw on his journey: whales, sixty-foot waves, the sun disappearing into the ocean: “things you can’t see from the comfort of your couch.”

Reading this story had a big impact on my twenty-four-year-old self. I loved the man’s attitude, and his refusal to allow a stranger to walk into his life and impose a separate interpretation on something he himself had experienced firsthand. “We only fail when we don’t try,” I remember him saying. He spoke about the importance of utilizing our own agency and experiencing for ourselves the reality of life. Something within me responded very much to that idea.

When I pled innocent and demanded a trial, I did so for the very simple reason that I hadn’t killed anyone, as the state alleged. And, thank god, I was still young and naive enough to believe that my innocence was the only thing that mattered. No, I had never experienced a trial, had never witnessed with my own eyes the machinery of justice; and, it turns out, not very many people have. In fact, of the over 2.6 million people behind bars, 95 percent of them took a “deal”; this, regardless of whether they were actually guilty or not. But I didn’t know this then. The only thing I knew is that I was NOT going to plead guilty to something I didn’t do.

So, like my friend on the sailboat, I decided that I would “circumnavigate” the criminal justice system. Like everyone else, I’d heard the words JUSTICE and INNOCENT UNTIL PROVEN GUILTY before, but I wanted to meet them face to face. I was done living in the comfort of my ignorance and accepting, without challenge, the reality of life. And if the cost of knowing the truth was death, well, I was ready to pay it; and pay it, I did.

But that doesn’t mean I failed. If anything, I’m the proud recipient of a top-notch education. The things I’ve seen (to say nothing of the things I’ve learned from the hundreds of books I’ve read), you wouldn’t believe. I mean, equal to a whale or a sixty-foot wave is an all-white jury, twelve faces fixed with hate before they’ve even heard one shred of evidence. Oh, it’s awe inspiring! To see a racist judge robed in black, stacking and then dealing from the bottom of the deck–trust me when I tell you, it

But after 20 years we were able to touch our families, have full contact visits. We was able to access the legal database and what not. And so that was a small victory in relation to this bigger thing that needs to happen in order to change the system as a whole.

Here recently, as you know, the attorney general there in California …

[Automated Voice: This call is originating from an Ohio Correctional Facility and may be recorded and monitored.]

Bomani: … agreed to let over 2,000 men out of Pelican Bay out of solitary confinement. Those guys have been moved to other institutions and to other locations inside Pelican Bay, decreasing the level of sensory deprivation and what not, these very detrimental things that are inflicted on a person in these types of situations.

And so that was monumental, man, the pressure that you and reporters like yourself put on politicians by bringing awareness to the public and the rallies and what not that you guys had. And I think that has to be the pattern across the state, but it comes through this thing that you and I are doing right now.

Just having these conversations, broadcasting them to a wider audience, trying to get people to understand that we’re trying – that we need help to educate these young people. You know, just like I’m calling in talking to you, I also call in to juvenile facilities, I call in to high schools talking to kids who have been basically kicked to the curb because of behavioral problems, placed in classrooms like prisons, and so I’m talking to them about the very things I’m talking to you about – about education, about trying to gain some awareness about what’s going on, how these changes in society impact you personally and collectively.

So, it’s just a process of trying to educate people. When you know better, you can do better, obviously.

M.O.I. JR: For people across the nation and here on the West Coast, if they want to assist you and/or communicate with you, how could they do that?

Joy lights up the dreariness of prison life when Bomani’s niece and nephew, Kayla and Kevin, come to visit. Youth are at the top of his agenda.

Bomani: Well, like I said, I have a website, keithlamar.org. Also, on Facebook, “Justice for Keith LaMar.” We’re starting a Twitter campaign, trying to raise awareness through that avenue, trying to use this technology to our benefit, trying to become a part of that mainstream process. But yeah, go to my website, keithlamar.org, and from there you will find how to contact me

But it's an ongoing thing because these places are set up so we can't talk, so we can't communicate. It's against the rules to pass a book to someone else. It's against the rules to stand in somebody's cell and try to get them to see this larger picture. It's against the rules because it's against their interests to have these guys educated and what not.

Out in California, what they were able to do, Todd Ashker and all those brothers, what they were able to do with the end of hostilities – that was a monumental thing during the hunger strike that occurred out there. That was monumental.

And I think Todd admitted to being inspired by the hunger strike that we had back in 2011. It was three of us – me, Siddique Abdullah Hasan and Jason Robb – guys who were indicted and convicted after the riot. We went on a 12-day hunger strike and won that; I guess you could call that a victory. Although after the hunger strike was over, we still remained in the supermax.

[Another family visit]

doesn't get any better than that. This is the show that not many people get to see, because the price of admission is so steep. But to see it is to be transformed, to be forever changed.

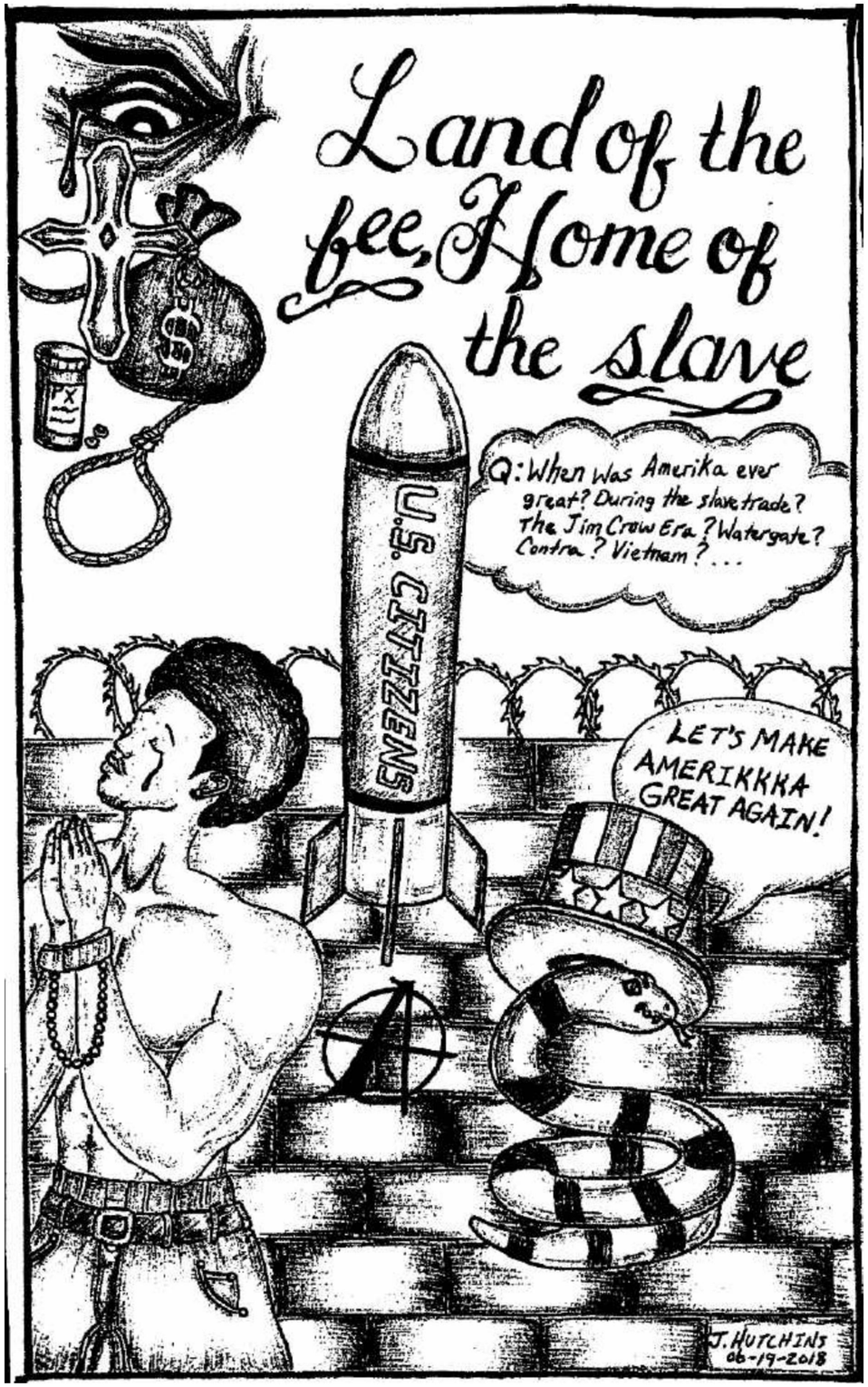
I tried explaining this to a college professor once, and he concluded that I had been helped by these people in some way; that the harsh treatment I was forced to endure was ultimately a "good thing." I reject that characterization. In fact, I was placed in a situation wherein it was fully expected that I would not survive. Years later, after being on death row for over a decade, I had a chance encounter with one of the prosecutors who put me here, and he couldn't believe I was still standing; he looked at me as if he saw a ghost. Indeed, they threw me into the middle of the ocean and left me for dead, believing that I would surely drown. It was God who taught me how to swim, not them.

Listen: when it comes to life and death, there's no such thing as a "deal"; you're either living or you're not. And that's the question I think we should all ask ourselves this coming year: are we living now? Are we doing the things that will make our lives better and brighter? Obviously, there's a lot of darkness to overcome in this world, a lot of evil forces to contend with, and the only way to successfully confront these things is together. I really believe that.

I continue to hear about all the "friends" I have on Facebook, people who have peeped my page and "liked" the content. That's cool. But let me tell you: If you are here because you feel sorry for me, you have misunderstood. If you are here because you recognize that your struggle is bound up with mine, then perhaps we can work together (to paraphrase aboriginal artist Lilla Watson).

To that end,
I look forward,
with love and solidarity,
and blessings in this new year,

Bomani



Again, man, it's just an ongoing thing where Black, particularly Black men and poor people in general are being oppressed and just slaughtered by the system and, you know, I'm a part of that, what's going on with me, even though I've been afforded a trial. It's basically more pretense than an actual trial or actual justice that's being delivered in these cases.

We're just trying to put it all together and so that it's all connected, it all stems from the same thing: racism, oppression and the unequal distribution of wealth that all poor people are suffering from. It all comes from the same place. We all have the same struggle, the same enemy, if you want to call 'em that, adversary or however you want to look at it; it's all the same people.

M.O.I. JR: Can you talk about the prison movement in Ohio and what's been going on in California. They've had the agreement to end hostilities to try to curb some of the Black on Brown as well as some of the other racial violence that has been going on, which is perpetrated by the state. Can you give us a view into what are some of the challenges the Ohio prison class is facing as well as …

[Automated Voice: This call is originating from an Ohio Correctional Facility and may be recorded and monitored.]

M.O.I. JR: Can you tell us a little bit about the challenges you guys face as a prison movement as well as what are some of the victories that the Ohio prisoner class has won?

Bomani: Well, the challenge that we face is education. A lot of these young guys in these gangs, it's hard to explain to them that they're brothers, that their loyalty should lie with each other no matter which random city they were born in or what not.

A lot of this stuff happens when these young guys don't really know their history, don't really understand who their natural enemies are, so they turn on each other, you know, because in here as on the street, poor people are fighting over limited resources. And so these gangs come about because of these limited resources and all of us trying to get access to them in order to eat, in order to live.

And so, you know, it's an education process and that's one of the reasons why I didn't want my books to be confiscated, because a lot of these books – I've read them over and over again: George Jackson's "Soledad Brother," Assata Shakur. You know, all these different books that talk about the movement talk about the history of the struggle that we've been engaged in.
And so I share these books with these younger guys in hopes of trying to get them to open their eyes and realize the struggle that we're all engaged in and to also start to understand that fighting each other is part of the problem, not part of the solution.

Bomani: We started a Twitter campaign, there's a documentary out called "Condemned"; you can go to my website, keithlamar.org, to view that. I've written a book, "Condemned" by Keith LaMar; you can go to my website again or to Amazon to obtain a copy of that. So we're just trying to do it on our own, if nothing else.

Since if I'm executed, it will be done in the public's name, we're trying to get the public to be aware of what's being done in their name. It's a travesty of justice that's being perpetrated in their name.

We're just asking people, normal, everyday people, to get involved, to wake up and realize that the system is basically a sham – that it is unduly focused on poor marginalized people. In order for us to really address things in a way that need to be addressed, more people need to become aware, need to wake up.

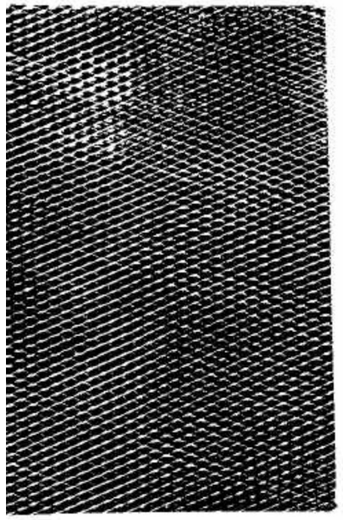
[Image above: Bomani's Uncle Dwight "Mannie" LaMar and cousin Tyrone Brooks pay him a visit.]

So I'm just trying to do that, in addition to working with youth, trying to get them to see that the system is rigged, that it's a trap …

[Automated Voice: Thank you for using Global Tel Link.]

Bomani: So we're just trying to bring awareness to the public, trying to get them to participate in this process. There's been a lot of protest going on across the country on college campuses and in the street. A brother just was recently murdered by police in Minneapolis, Minn.

05-23-2019



If you are receiving this message it means you were secretly in on the most amazing birthday gift I have ever received, and I'm writing to personally thank each and every one of you for reminding me that there's still so much goodness in this world. More than the money attached, I'm humbled by the fact that so many people were involved in making my life a little better/easier.

You know, I was nineteen years old when I first embarked on this journey, and I've seen and experienced things along the way that would shock and shatter the mind of the average individual: I'm talking about man's inhumanity to man. But that's not all I've seen. I've met and become friends with some of the most amazing people on the planet, people who have burrowed their way into the darkness of my life and have provided the light I needed to see my way through. I don't know where I would be (mentally/spiritually) if this weren't true. Somehow, when things seemed at their worst, I've always received some kind of reminder of my strength and worth, a reason to keep believing in myself; like now :-)

Many of you I have only had minimum contact with: an exchange of letters, a question asked over the phone, a card that simply said, "Hello; stay strong." I've appreciated it all, and I want it to be understood that all of it—everything!—has touched me deep inside my

soul. It's the reason why I'm still standing, the reason why I'm still sane, and the fact that I'm turning fifty is testament to the fact that love sustains.

Since receiving my execution date, I've been asked over and over again, "What's next?" And I wish there was a simple answer to that question. The more I've learned about the criminal justice system in this country, the more I've come to understand that who lives and dies is basically a crap shoot, which is to say there's no real rhyme or reason why some people receive justice and some people don't. Like most everything, justice is a commodity, a thing that is either bought or sold; and if/when you have no money to pay the price, you roll the dice and hope…

I've been hoping (and praying, yes) for some kind of divine intervention, but l've also been trying to LIVE what remains of my life, and not always be caught up in worrying about what might happen to my body on some future date. In this way, I've been trying to address myself to what it means to be alive, to BE here on this planet, in this moment, at this time. Fifty years is a long time to be somewhere, and it seems that I should have a stronger sense of what I'm doing here. To that end, I've been reading and thinking and trying to organize my thoughts around what it means to be free—i.e., what it means to live without fear, to love without hate. As a fifty-year-old, I feel like I should be better at doing these things than I presently am. I intend to do better.

I never thought I would make it this far and still be intact, with a whole heart and mind, but here I am. Thank you all for believing in me, for supporting me, and for showing me sooooo much love. I never thought that was possible either, but here it is: proof that the best possible things are still possible. Please know that I will NEVER give up, never stop believing in tomorrow.

Your friend and brother,
Bomani Shakur

p.s. / "Shakur" means thankful, and I'm most definitely that!
THANK YOU!! :-)

over my hearing came back with a negative ruling, denied my appeal. And right now, I'm basically out of gas with respect to the legal situation.

We're exploring options in terms of getting new counsel, because my attorneys – this case that I got caught up in, this situation that I got caught up in was very political – and even my own attorneys I think bowed to the pressure and didn't fully represent my issues in the ways they should have been represented. So we're trying to explore the options of getting an attorney outside of this state – hopefully without any influence by the political pressure of the state – to present my issues the way they should be presented.

Barring that, I might receive an execution date sometime in the near future. What we tried to do on the grassroots level …

[Automated Voice: You have one minute remaining.]

The hunger strike ended a couple of days ago when the warden agreed that he had jumped the gun. He also agreed that we'd be allowed to keep our books and CDs and a few other things that will be worked out in the future – moving us to a less disruptive living situation. Because we're long term prisoners, we'd have to file another lawsuit to order to have the state alleviate the pressure of the situation that we're in.

But in the meantime we asked them to move us to another pod, a less disruptive pod, since we'll be here for the duration, for the foreseeable future we'll still be here. And so the hunger strike came to, I guess you could say, a peaceful resolution. We were able to keep our CDs and books and other additional extended property limits that we were afforded back in 2011.

So that's basically the gist of it. We've been struggling since 1993, trying to bring our case to the court of public opinion. I wrote a book as you know, "Condemned," to tell my story from my perspective and try to give people a more in-depth understanding of what actually occurred and what's still occurring right now in terms of the oppression, repression.

We're trying to do interviews with the media; they blocked those so we filed a lawsuit to get the media in here so we can tell our side of the story. From the very beginning, that's been the whole modus operandi of the state: Suppress the truth and present only what they want the public to believe. That again is how power operates.

Based on this one side of mainstream media – they tell their one side of the story – about what's going on with Michael Brown, what's going on with Missouri, what's going on in the Middle East, all from the people in power positions. We're just trying to – I'm personally trying to – fight against that, to stand up and represent myself the best that I can, given my limitations.

M.O.I. JR: Brother Bomani, where is your case at right now? And I know that the government is intending to try to assassinate you if us, if we the people do not get involved in a big way. Tell us a little bit about those plans.

Bomani: My case was just heard at the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals – basically my last shot at release. They denied my appeal about a month ago, even though …

[Automated Voice: This call is originating from an Ohio Correctional Facility and may be recorded and monitored.]

Bomani: Even though over a hundred-some people attended my oral argument and witnessed with their own eyes the weakness of the state's case against me – they fabricated evidence; they hid evidence; they couldn't even defend their position – and still the three judges who presided

Crime and Punishment

December 2011

> *"The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons."*
>
> –Dostoyevsky

If what Dostoyevsky says is true (and I believe it is), then America, which boast the largest prison population in the world, is perhaps the most uncivilized country there is. A bold statement, I know, especially coming from someone who has spent the past twenty-three years behind bars. But if what Dostoyevsky says is true, then what happens inside these places is crucial to understanding what kind of society we live in; and who better to speak to the reality of prison life than someone who is living the experience?

But no one wants to learn about the madness that predominates inside these places. People – average, law-abiding citizens- are losing their homes, jobs, and are struggling to survive, and the last thing anyone wants to hear is how hard prison is for a bunch of criminals. "If you can't do the time, don't do the crime" is the prevailing sentiment and attitude. It never occurs that the rising incarceration rate is connected to the same economic and political policies that resulted in the home-foreclosure crisis and the rise in unemployment.

When people think of crime, what usually comes to mind is a poor person inflicting pain upon another poor person. Very seldom, if ever, do we stop and allow ourselves to consider the forces that create crime; trapped by the pull of our own necessities and fears, we live reactively, focusing on the effects instead of the causes of what we see and believe—and so we remain

divided. And it's precisely because of this division that we are our own worst enemies—divided, they rule us!

But who are "they", and what do they have to do with the way in which we see and treat each other?

Howard Zinn, in his book A People's History of the United States, tells us who they are and how they use us against one another:

"[T]he wealthiest one percent of the nation owns a third of the wealth. The rest of the wealth is distributed in such a way as to turn those in the 99 percent against one another: small property owners against the propertyless, black against white, native-born against foreign-born, intellectuals and professionals against the uneducated and unskilled…"

Hence, in the context of a capitalistic society, crime is the result of an unequal distribution of wealth. As such, a distinction between guilt and responsibility must be made. For instance, a person can be guilty of selling drugs but not at all responsible for creating the conditions wherein selling drugs is the only viable option of survival. Indeed, when one lives in a society where profit takes precedence over human potential, one's very existence becomes a crime; and whether this takes on the form of selling drugs, stealing food, or joining a gang to fight over turf and limited resources, the goal is to stay alive.

I grew up in poverty, born to a marginally educated black woman who, because of a lack of opportunity, sought to raise me and my three siblings on welfare. In the whole 42 years I've been alive, I've only seen my father one time. By the age of ten, I was stealing food from the neighborhood grocery store in order to survive. I was thirteen when I took my first joyless joyride in a stolen vehicle, which ultimately led to my being sent away for the first time. By the time I turned seventeen, I had been living on my own for several years and selling drugs in one of the most impoverished, drug-infested neighborhoods in Cleveland, Ohio. A few months after my nineteenth birthday, in 1988, the year crack cocaine became an epidemic, I was involved in a shoot-out over money and I killed a rival drug dealer. For this, I was sent to prison to serve a life sentence for murder.

considered strong politically, physically or whatever inside the prison, guys were singled out, basically made examples of. I was one of those guys. They came to me…

[Automated Voice: This call is originating from an Ohio correctional facility and may be recorded and monitored.]

Bomani: I was 23 at the time. They wanted me to cop out, wanted me to become an informant, because the block where all the snitches were allegedly murdered was the block that I happened to be assigned to by the administration. That was the pod that I lived in at the time.

And so they suspected that I knew more than I divulged, and so they wanted me to become an informant. I refused. They wanted me to accept a deal. I refused. I went to trial, got railroaded. They took my case to an all-white county near Lucasville, railroaded me, put me on death row.

Fast forward 20 years, I've been in solitary confinement since 1993. For the past 18 years, I've been at the Ohio State Penitentiary in Youngstown, Ohio – the supermax facility, similar to the supermax facility you guys got out there in California, Pelican Bay. And so I've been on lockdown 23 hours a day here for the past 23 years.

Just recently my appeal was denied – moved me one step closer to execution. Just a few weeks ago, a new warden was appointed here and came in without speaking to us, without figuring out what was the lay of the land and just basically talking about stripping us of some of our privileges – particularly our CDs and books.

CDs and books, under these circumstances, are essential to maintaining your mental and emotional equilibrium. I wasn't going to allow myself to be left in this cell – looking at the walls – without anything to help me cope with the daily mind numbing pressure you're under in these types of circumstances.

So I decided to go on hunger strike so basically they didn't push me to the edge, the brink of my existence. This final move was I think something – I wouldn't say designed, because I don't think the warden gave it any thought to how I would respond or react to his decision – I think these people make all these policies while sitting in their office without any sense how it will impact the people that they're imposing these on.

But that's how power operates: It don't have any thoughts about how the policies and practices will affect real everyday people. That's something – they don't give a damn. I wasn't going to allow all these people to push me off the planet, put me in the position where I'm constantly worried about my mental stability and what not. And so I went on the hunger strike.

Death Row

in conversation with People's Minister of Information, JR Valrey

Today our guest on Block Report Radio is Bomani, formally known as Keith LaMar. He is an Ohio death row political prisoner and survivor of the Lucasville Rebellion 23 years ago. He will talk to us about the history of that rebellion, his recent hunger strike, the state of Ohio planning to set his execution date and more.

M.O.I. JR: It's on honor to have you on, my brother. Can you tell the people about the Lucasville Rebellion?

Bomani: A little over 23 years ago at the prison in Lucasville, Southern Ohio Correctional Facility in southern Ohio, and the Muslim prisoners were having a dispute or discrepancy with the warden over their administering of Tuberculosis tests. Apparently the tests that they were using contained phenol, which is an alcoholic substance.

Based on the Islamic doctrine, the Muslims, particularly the Sunni Muslims, are prohibited from ingesting this chemical, and so they tried to meet with the warden to come up with alternative ways to determine whether or not they had TB. And the warden of the time, a guy named Arthur Tate, a real hard liner, decided to press their hand and refused to give them an alternative. And so the Muslims started what they expected to be a peaceful protest to try to garner out that attention and hopefully pressure the administration to give them alternatives.

At the time, back in 1993 – this was before Mike Brown, before Eric Garner, before this public unrest and what not – racism was very rampant down at the penitentiary. Guys were being beaten, bullied and moved from here to there. So when Muslims took over the prison, took keys and unlocked doors, you know, they unleashed years and years of pent up rage. Things very quickly got out of hand, ultimately ended with nine inmates being killed, one guard being murdered.

And that brought down the weight of the state on all us. Guys who even had any kind of radical leanings were basically put front and center, used as scapegoats to send a message throughout the system for anybody who thinking about rebellion, thinking about going against the administration.

Guys were singled out whether or not they had anything to do with the riot. Anybody who was

In a nutshell, this is the story of my life, and if any of it was unique, the telling of it would be inconsequential, an unnecessary recounting of my own personal troubles. However, what makes my story significant is that it's the exact same tale told by millions of poor people who grow up in the slums of America, which points to the possibility of there being something larger than one's personal troubles at work in the process to determine where one ends up in this society.

In his groundbreaking work on The Sociological Imagination, C. Wright Mills, using the example of unemployment, explains the difference between personal troubles and societal issues:

> *When, in a society of 100,000, only one man is unemployed, that is his personal trouble, and for its relief we properly look to the character of the man, his skills, and his immediate opportunities. But when in a nation of 50 million employees, 15 million men are unemployed, that is an issue, and we may not hope to find its solution within the range of opportunities open to any one individual. The very structure of opportunities has collapsed. Both the correct statement of the problem and the range of possible solutions require us to consider the economic and political institutions of society, and not merely the personal situation of a scatter of individuals.*

Applying the same logic, it should be considered an issue that black people – in a country wherein they only represent thirteen percent of the population—make up 50 percent of those who are sent to prison. It is likewise an issue that virtually 100 percent of those behind bars are poor and come from economically deprived sections of society.

In addressing this issue, it's not enough to point the finger at a bunch of so-called criminals and, without first looking at the economic and political institutions of society, claim that they are the sole cause of their predicament.

Despite what those in power would have us believe, no one starts out with the goal of becoming a criminal and spending the bulk of their lives behind bars, and in and out of prison. As individuals, we make choices based on what we perceive our options to be; and those options, be they good or bad, are a product of the society we live in.

"When a society is industrialized," explains C. Wright Mills, "a peasant becomes a worker; a feudal lord is liquidated or becomes a businessman. When classes rise and fall, a man is employed or unemployed; when the rate of investment goes up or down, a man takes new heart or goes broke. When wars happen, an insurance salesman becomes a rocket launcher; a store clerk, a radar man; a wife lives alone; a child grows up without a father."

Similarly, when a society is deindustrialized, a steel worker becomes a corrections officer; a would-be college student, a drug dealer. When communities are decimated and hemmed in by poverty, families take new heart or fall apart. When a fictitious "War on drugs" is declared on the inner-city, penitentiaries are built in rural areas and filled with criminals; a wife lives alone; a child grows up without a father.

Contrary to what we have been told, this is how life (under the system of capitalism) unfolds – not in a picnic basket of unlimited opportunity, but in a crucible of socioeconomic forces that force us to assume positions of survival. Thus, a steel worker becomes a corrections officer, not in pursuit of a lifelong dream but in order to feed his family. A boy growing up in the ghetto becomes a criminal/gang banger, not to glorify crime but in order to survive. And what C. Wright Mills would have us understand is that the various permutations that we as individuals undergo are directly connected to the economic and political permutations of the system.

When corporations, through Congress, lobby for the enactment of NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement), removing obstacles for corporate capital and goods to move back and forth between Mexico and the United States, they do so with full knowledge and understanding of the economic consequences. Cheaper labor means greater profits; but it also means the closing of factories, a lower standard of living, a subpar educational system, and an increase in crime, as normal, everyday citizens scramble to survive. And what do those in power do in order to address the ramifications of their decisions? They build more prisons.

With the advent of deindustrialization in the 1980s, the prison population in the United States more than quadrupled, peaking at 2.5 million and surpassing both South Africa and Russia in per capita prison populations.

I'm aware that criminals are viewed in a negative light, but what I would ask you all to consider is just how one becomes a criminal in this society.

We live in a country where the wealthiest 1 percent own a third of the wealth. Think about that. Think about all the factories that have been closed down and replaced by prisons.

Think about all the jobs that have been sent overseas, about the recent economic crisis that resulted in the banks being bailed out while normal, everyday citizens were left to fend for themselves. And, when thinking about these things, think about the causes instead of focusing on the effects, as those in power always insist that we do.

If you look at things from the bottom up, you'll see that crime is a reaction to the criminal accumulation of wealth perpetrated by the rich against the poor. Indeed, there are no rich people inside these places.

The guards whose "job" it is to enforce the brutal policies of those in power are poor. They come to work mad and disillusioned about their worth and place in a society that cares more about profits than people. And to work out their confused frustrations, they are allowed to torture us.

Isn't that how it always is: poor people inflicting pain on other poor people. When are we going to stop this madness and issue a collective indictment against those who profit from our collective pain and say, in the words of Frantz Fanon in "Black Skin, White Masks":

> *"And if, apparently, you succeed in keeping yourself unsullied, it is because others dirty themselves in your place. You hire thugs, and, balancing the accounts, it is you who are the real criminals: for without you, without your blind indifference, such men could never carry out deeds that damn you as much as they shame those men."*

I send these few words from Ohio's death row, from inside the belly of the beast called the Prison Industrial Complex. It is my hope that something I have said resonates and takes root. We need your help. People are dying who could be saved.

People are Being Tortured Inside These Places

Written August 23, 2011

I first of all want to say that this, what you all are doing, is long overdue and needed if we are ever going to change the direction of this unjust system. I know that for a lot of you the idea of resisting and speaking truth to power is instinctive, and we have to figure out a way to inject this spirit into more people, especially those whose lives aren't directly affected by the growing crisis of mass incarceration and the use of solitary confinement as a means of torture and punishment. One of the ways in which things have been allowed to get to this point is because normal, everyday citizens have been sold the "tough on crime" rhetoric preached by politicians who have a desire to be elected to office. However, what is going on here, inside these places, has gone far beyond the idea of making the community safe.

People are being tortured inside these places, forced to undergo conditions that that no human being should be asked to endure. And, yes,

During the same period (1980-2007) – while 30 million people languished below the poverty line – the United States produced 1,000 billionaires, and 227,000 millionaires with the combined worth of $30 trillion, more than the GDP's of China, Brazil, Japan, Russia, and the EU put together. This is how the system of capitalism works: the rich get richer, and the poor get screwed – i.e., fucked in the anus *sans grease*!

In his book Understanding Power, Noam Chomsky talks about what he refers to as "superfluous populations," which is a very intellectual way of calling people "trash." From the perspective of the rich, whose main objective is to accumulate wealth, human beings are useless when they no longer contribute to profit-making, so as a result, explains Noam Chomsky, they want to get rid of them—and the criminal justice system is one of the best ways of doing it.

So prisons—it must be understood—aren't about controlling crime and punishing those who commit it; they're about controlling the poor. Looked at correctly, it's not an exaggeration to say that what is going on now is very similar to what was going on in the 1940s when Hitler was exterminating the Jews. The only real difference is that those who are now being thrown away are considered "criminals" which, let's face it, makes it a whole lot easier to accept. But just as Hitler created the justification for the mass extermination of the Jews, so, too, have those in power created the justification for the mass incarceration of the poor.

When Ronald Reagan declared the so-called War on Drugs in the 1980s, a finely honed strategy of imposing mandatory sentences for particular kinds of drugs (read: crack cocaine) was used to lock up those from predominantly Black and Hispanic communities. For instance, a young man in the ghetto gets caught with a kilo of cocaine or twenty thousand dollars in cash, and he is sent to prison for twenty years. In the meantime, nothing is said about the chemical corporations who make billions of dollars from sending the necessary chemicals to Latin America in order to manufacture the very drugs that are destroying inner-cities throughout the United States.

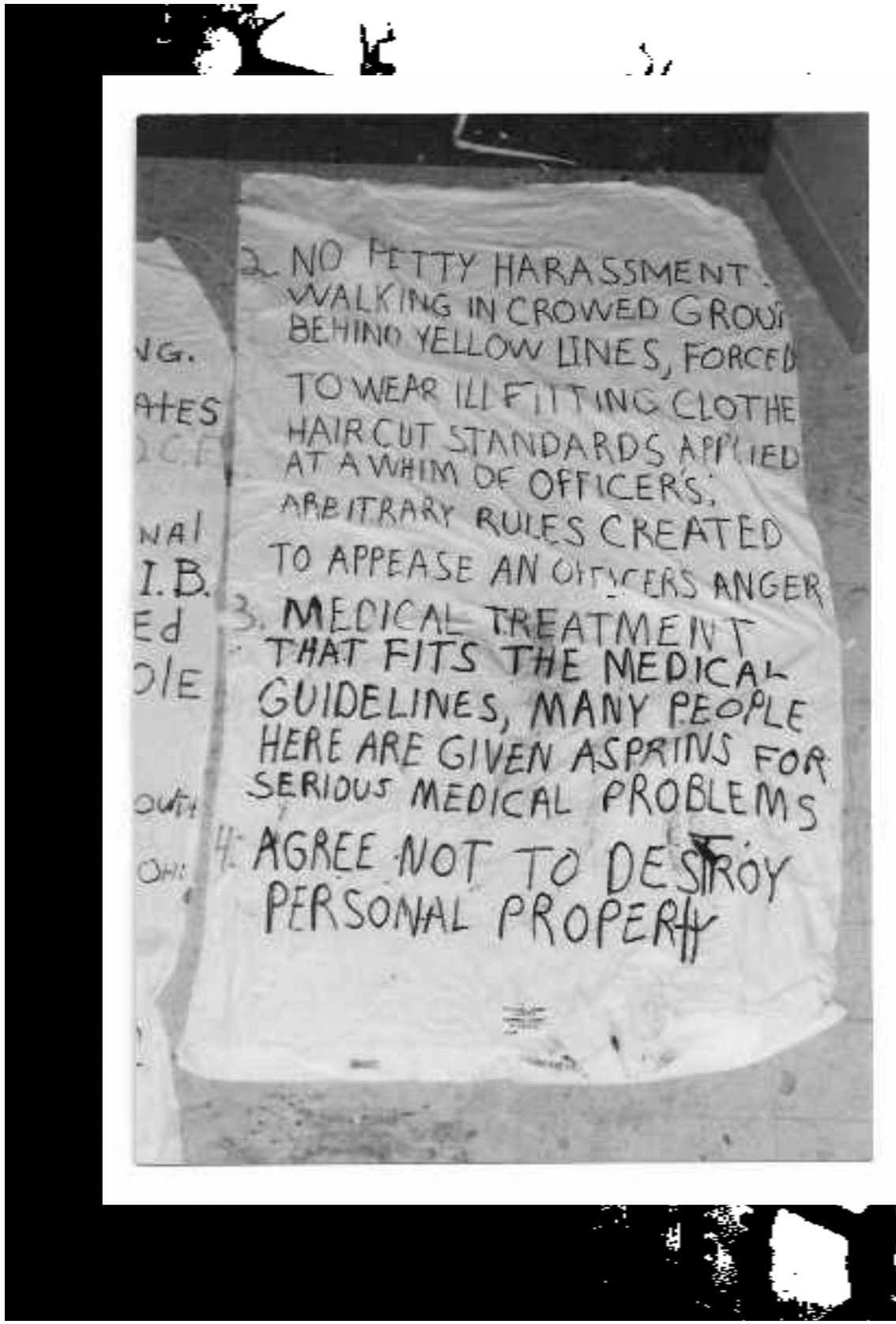
And what about the bankers who launder billions of dollars in drug money through American banks? According to the O.E.C.D. (Organization for

Economic Cooperation and Development), it's estimated that a half-trillion dollars in drug money gets laundered internationally each year—more than half of it ($260 billion) through American banks. But are any of these people in prison? The answer is NO! And the reason why none of these people are in prison is because those in power determine what constitutes a crime and, more importantly, who gets categorized as criminals. A white man laundering billions of dollars in drug money is a businessman. A black man selling drugs in the ghetto is a criminal; and for his "crimes," he is sent to prison.

And what happens to that Black—poor White or Hispanic—man when he enters America's prisons? If he makes it through orientation without being raped, he's lucky. It's a brutal world in here, and unless one is totally devoid of common sense, one very quickly learns that there is safety in numbers. In other words, the picture repeats and expands, and it's the ghetto streets all over again. But in here the police operate without restraint, and the old adage about "absolute power corrupting absolutely" is on full display, Not a day goes by without someone being sprayed in the face with mace, shot with a pellet gun, or thrown down a flight of stairs.

A few weeks ago, while watching the news, I witnessed a group of college students in California being sprayed in the face with mace because they had the audacity to protest against the rising cost of college tuition, student-loan debt, and the uncertainty surrounding future employment. In New York City (and around the country), I witnessed members of Occupy Wall Street being forcibly evicted from their camps, some (as in Oakland California) being shot with pellet guns, thrown atop automobiles, and kicked and shoved about like cattle. Watching these things, it occurred to me that this is what Dostoyevsky must have meant when he said, "The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons." Indeed, what many Americans witnessed and experienced for the first time is something that those of us in prison witness and experience on a daily basis.

So why are normal, everyday citizens being treated as criminals, and for what crimes are they being punished? From the perspective of those who own society, it's considered a lack of appreciation when slaves rise up to question their masters; and of course when people come together and begin to talk



for 13 days, winning greatly expanded contact with the outside world and legal resources.

2012: Demanding release from the supermax, but accepting concessions of congregate rec and full contact visits, Jason Robb went on hunger strike for 9 days.

2013: coordinated with the 20th Anniversary Re-Examining Lucasville conference, Keith, Hasan, Greg and Jason went on hunger strike demanding on camera interviews with media. They didn't win their demand, but got enough attention to start the ongoing media access lawsuit.

2015: Keith and Jason went on hunger strike for 9 and 6 days respectively, reversing policy changes intended to take away most of supermax prisoners' books and music.

2016: Imam Hasan and other Muslim supermax prisoners engaged in a series of hunger strikes relating to the September 9th national protest and moves the administration made to silence Hasan's advocacy for the nation-wide action.

earnestly about the inequity of the system, they automatically represent a threat to the status quo and must go. Then we learn how thin the veneer of civilization really is, and how fragile our so-called freedoms are.

When eyes are burning with mace, when blood is dripping down the face, it all becomes frighteningly clear: capitalism is a sham; and whether in or out (of prison), as long as we live under a system that views everything and everybody as a commodity, we're all doing time. And that, at the end of the day, is the real crime—not that some of us are locked up, but that none of us are free!

01-23-2019

My name is Keith LaMar, aka Bomani Shakur, and I'm a death row prisoner in the state of Ohio. A little over a hundred years ago, in 1916, an African-American man by the name of Jesse Washington, who was falsely accused of murdering a white woman, was lynched in Waco, Texas. He wasn't hanged, as was customary during the time. First he was castrated, then his fingers were cut off, then he was raised and lowered over a bonfire for two hours, until he finally died. His charred body was then dismembered, the torso dragged through the streets, and other parts of his body sold as souvenirs to a throng of white people who had gathered to witness this gruesome scene. This is the true face of racism, what it looks like under the false front of civility, behind the simulated gestures of normality. In other words, it's harder to see it nowadays, harder to put your finger on it, but it's there.

I saw it when the state of Ohio falsely accused me of murder in 1993, after claiming I was the leader of a group dubbed the "death squad," who, according to the state, was responsible for the deaths of five jailhouse informants during the infamous Lucasville prison uprising. After proclaiming my innocence and demanding my day in court, my case was moved to a virtually all-white city called Ironton, Ohio. The proceedings lasted 30 days, during which time a white judge aided and abetted two white prosecutors in depriving me of a fair hearing of the facts. Indeed, there were no facts: no physical or forensic evidence linked me to any of the murders. And yet an all-white jury found me guilty and sentenced me to death!

On the day of sentencing, though the courtroom had remained virtually empty throughout the entire trial, another throng of white people gathered to witness the not-so gruesome scene. Apparently, they had no interest in hearing the evidence or weighing the facts: word went out that a black man was about to be lynched, and they simply surfaced out of thin air. I remember standing there thinking to myself, "Where did they come from; how did they know?"

This is the kind of racism that's difficult to pin down, the kind that shows up wearing suits and ties, pretending to be "concerned citizens"; the kind that drapes itself in black robes, and hides behind legal statutes and blindfolds. No, they won't cut your fingers off these days, or hoist your body over a bonfire; worse, they'll give you what appears to be a fair trial, then find you guilty with no evidence to support the verdict, then throw you in solitary confinement for decades (until you either lose your mind or exhaust your appeals), then strap you down to a gurney and pump poison through your veins—and, worse of all, after all is said and done, they'll call it justice!

I write these words on the verge of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, having just received the news that the state of Ohio intends to carry out my execution on the 16th of November, 2023. As you

- take action with a rally, banner drop, or other visible disruption to draw attention to the uprising and these rebels
- use this flyer designed by the Free Ohio Movement to promote your event.

Media exposure has been a recurring goal for these prisoners. The uprising spontaneously grew out of a much smaller protest aimed at drawing attention to conditions and abuses at SOCF. Key demands the prisoners won in negotiations during the occupation included access to reporters and live coverage. Since the uprising, survivors have been fighting to tell their stories using hunger strikes, lawsuits and persistent defiance of the ODRC's policies of silence and isolation. These prisoners and their supporters believe that telling the truth about Lucasville on the largest possible platform is key to fighting their unjust sentences. They are fighting for their lives and their freedom.

In 2013 five of the prisoners and five journalists filed a lawsuit against the ODRC. The judge has made preliminary rulings in favor of the prisoners and journalists. More interview requests at this time will impact the outcome of that litigation and might convince the ODRC to relent and finally allow on-camera interviews with the prisoners. Pursuing this concession, supporters put together an extensive press package encouraging journalists to write on the 25th anniversary of the uprising.

Taking action wherever you are between April 11 and 21st will make the story current and newsworthy, it could help save the lives of these inspiring revolutionaries.

A few examples of hunger strikes against the Ohio State Penitentiary (the supermax Ohio built in response to the Lucasville uprising):

> 2011: Inspired by the 2010 Georgia prison strike, and inspiring the massive Pelican Bay hunger strikes, three death sentenced Lucasville survivors (Imam Hasan, Keith LaMar, and Jason Robb) refused food

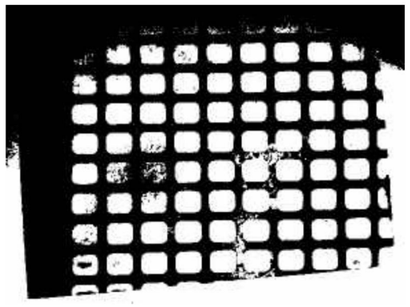
Prisoner survivors of this rebellion have spent these 25 years acting as beacons of resistance despite suffering in solitary confinement and on death row. Their persistent and stiff resistance has wrenched concessions from the State of Ohio, improved conditions for all prisoners at the supermax and inspired and participated in the burgeoning nation-wide prisoner resistance movement. From another cell-block occupation in 1997, to lawsuits against the supermax, to successful hunger strikes in 2011-2013 (see links below), to death sentence resistance, to Imam Siddique Abdullah Hasan's participation and advocacy for the nation-wide strike and prisoner protest on September 9 2016, these prisoners have been at the heart of the burgeoning prisoner resistance movement.

Now is the time to act in solidarity with them, to expose the truth of the Lucasville Uprising and to demand justice for the prisoner survivors. Please join in protest and acts of solidarity with the uprising:

- host a screening of The Shadow of Lucasville or Condemned, radical free documentaries about the uprising and its survivors
- organize a letter writing night and discussion relating the uprising to recent prisoner rebellions. We can coordinate for Imam Hasan or Greg Curry to call in to your gathering from the supermax prison and participate in the discussion

all know, Dr. King was himself executed on the 4th of April, 1968, shot through the head with a bullet, and it was racism that killed him. It was racism that killed Jonny Gammage in Pittsburgh; it was racism that killed Tamir Rice in Cleveland; it was racism that killed Eric Garner in Staten Island; it was racism that killed Sandra Bland in Texas; it was racism that killed Freddie Gray in Baltimore; it was racism that killed Trayvon Martin in Florida. And if they kill me, it will be racism that does it. Hence, it is racism that must be killed:

But we must study the problem. . .
(Racism is evil—z!)
We need more time. . .
(Racism is evil—kill it!)
Not all officers are bad. . .
(Racism is evil—kill it!)
We're filling up the prisons. . .
(Racism is evil—kill it!)
We're doing the best we can!
(Racism is evil—kill it!)



"For evil to succeed," said Martin Luther King, Jr., "all it needs is for good people to do nothing." Well, you are the good people, the ones in whom the future of this society rests. I truly believe this. It may be too late for people like myself, hard as that is to admit, but I'm hoping that sharing a little of my story will add fuel to the fire that is already burning where you are. I hope you'll believe me when I tell you that people are dying who could be saved. Fear and hate doesn't have to have the final say. And, of course, when I say that racism must be killed, I'm speaking about the erroneous "idea" that the color of a person's skin is determinative of a person's worth. No matter what THEY say. We all have a place on this earth, a right to live and fight for what's real, and a right to die for what we believe in. If worse comes to worst… well, it's freedom first above all things.

Peace and Love,

Bomani Shakur

04-6-2018

Act in Solidarity with the Survivors of the Lucasville Uprising!

Central Ohio IWOC, the Free Ohio Movement and Lucasville Amnesty call for actions and raising awareness around the 25th anniversary of the Lucasville Uprising on April 11-21. Drawing attention to this pivotal event in the history of prison in Ohio and the US, protesters will hold a 3PM noise demo on the 21st outside the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility (SOCF) in Lucasville where prisoners held a cell block for 11 days in April of 1993.